



**DURHAM
CATHEDRAL**

THE SHRINE OF ST CUTHBERT

Praying Together

*during the week beginning Sunday 13 December
The Third Sunday of Advent*

During this time of great anxiety and uncertainty, we want to stay in touch with our regular worshippers and indeed with everyone who is associated with the Cathedral family. We are delighted that we have been able to reintroduce congregational worship here at the Cathedral. Durham Cathedral is also open for private prayer and quiet reflection.

If you'd like to come to the cathedral for worship and/or prayer, there are some important measures we'd like you to know about, to ensure the safety of members of the public and staff. You can find this information on our website: www.durhamcathedral.co.uk We will continue to live stream services as well so that, if you can't re-join us yet, you will still be able to engage with us online.

Gospel

John1. 6-8, 19-28

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, 'I am not the Messiah.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord" ', as the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, 'Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?' John answered them, 'I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.' This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

Thought for the Day

by the Reverend Canon Michael Everitt

There used to be an adage that next to a preacher's Bible should be the newspaper, to contrast the news with the "Good News" as a means of rooting the sermon in the moment. I fear that to do that at the moment my singing, "In the bleak midwinter, frosty winds made moan," might continue too long.

However there has been positive news this last week. A few months ago, the Prime Minister referred to the "distant bugle of the scientific cavalry coming over the brow of the hill."

This week has seen the beginning of a mass vaccination programme, with a suitable mixture of expressed hope and cautioned reservation. The enormity of the challenge is becoming clearer and realism dampens down the excitement of this turning point.

This year has been a wilderness year. One where the usual constructs of life have been taken away and as the Canon Professor highlighted last Sunday, one where in a similar way to the children of Israel with manna, or John the Baptist with locust and honey from wild bees, our intake has been from the providence and grace of God, rather than our own cultivation or stability.

It is into this wilderness, desolation and uncharted and changing landscape that the various vaccines have come and we ask numerous questions. What are they? Are they a solution to all our problems? Are they that will enable everything to return to the previous status quo? Who, how and when will it happen?

You will note that I am comparing this situation to John. A man who, in the wilderness and beyond the river Jordan is interrogated as to who he is, what he is about and with whom does he operate. It is always easier to ask questions, often without pausing to listen to the answers, let alone reflect on what the response might mean.

It is interesting to note that the questioning is by faceless groups on behalf of interested parties. The questions, not being true enquiries, but attempts to discredit or trip up, ones ultimately interested therefore in scandal.

John gives clarity that he is not the answer to any question, but one who points towards another. His context and his actions within that place do indeed bring a fulfilment but the definition is not limited to himself.

He makes straight the way, he acts to prepare for one who he recognises as being present, who is the light of the world, and in relation to whom, all these city-based questions (politics in its purest meaning) carry any sense or relevance.

Actions and voices in the wilderness are important. From Moses' encounter with God in the bush that was on fire, yet not being consumed, through the forty years of exodus for the Children of Israel to the vision of waste-places being transformed, of moving from wearing ashes to being bedecked with garlands of hope.

There amid the wrestling with both demons and angels we can find that which shows where we can discover life, illumination and wholeness. John testifies to this life, the light of the world, namely Jesus Christ.

It is all too easy to put our hope in specific developments, especially when we have been deprived of that which is nourishing. The vaccination programme is a tremendous step forward and offers more than distant bugles. However, we know that cavalry action can sometimes fail, we are regularly reminded in the psalms not to put all our faith in them.

We need to be accurate in what we can expect from certain things in certain contexts. With John it was as one "preparing the way," with the vaccine it is medical and scientific intervention to protect people from this virus. With Christ, it is the one in whom we see God is with us, who is full of grace and truth.

To gain this understanding, our questions need to be our own, and not that of others, and with recognition of needing to hear the answer and be affected by it. Then we shall see the reality, not the rhetoric; true meaning and not empty words, empty cities once more rebuilt. Amen

A Form of Intercession for Advent

We pray for the coming of God's kingdom.
Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

You sent your Son to bring good news to the poor,
sight to the blind,
freedom to captives
and salvation to your people:
anoint us with your Spirit;
rouse us to work in his name.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to bring help to the poor
and freedom to the oppressed.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to tell the world
the good news of your healing love.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to those who mourn,
to bring joy and gladness instead of grief.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

Send us to proclaim that the time is here
for you to save your people.

Father, by your Spirit
bring in your kingdom.

God of mercy,
**you know us and love us
and hear our prayer:
keep us in the eternal fellowship of
Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen.**

Hymn

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Come then and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings from the King of kings.

Then cleansed be every Christian breast,
And furnished for so great a guest!
Yea, let us each our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.

For thou art our salvation, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without thy grace our souls must fade,
And wither like a flower decayed.

Stretch forth thine hand to heal our sore,
And make us rise, to fall no more;
Once more upon thy people shine,
And fill the world with love divine.

All praise, eternal Son, to thee
Whose advent sets thy people free,
Whom, with the Father, we adore,
And Spirit blest, for evermore. Amen.

*Charles Coffin
translated by John Chandler*

Calendar of Holy Days

Monday 14 December	John of the Cross, Poet, Teacher, 1591
Thursday 17 December	O Sapientia
Friday 18 December	O Adonai
Saturday 19 December	O Radix Jesse

This year's Advent Procession with Carols has been pre-recorded and is available as an online act of worship on the Cathedral's Facebook page and YouTube channel for a limited period. We hope that you will engage with us in this great and moving act of worship to mark the beginning of the season of Advent.

The Advent Antiphons

These ancient texts, based on the prophecy of Isaiah, have been used during the latter part of Advent since the sixth century. They are sung as antiphons before and after the singing of the Magnificat, the first canticle at Evensong. The first letter of the Latin heading for each antiphon, read backwards, forms "ero cras" which means "tomorrow, I will come", reminding us that these are prophecies of the Messiah whose coming we await in this holy season. They add intensity to our worship and bring our Advent preparation to a joyful conclusion.

O SAPIENTIA—17 December

O Wisdom, which camest out of the mouth of the Most High, and reachest from one end to another, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: come and teach us the way of prudence.

O ADONAI—18 December

O Adonai, and Leader of the house of Israel, who appearedst in the bush to Moses in a flame of fire, and gavest him the law in Sinai: come and deliver us with an outstretched arm.

O RADIX JESSE – 19 December

O Root of Jesse, which standest for an ensign of the people, at whom kings shall shut their mouths, to whom the Gentiles shall seek: come and deliver us, and tarry not.

O CLAVIS DAVID – 20 December

O Key of David and Sceptre of the house of Israel; that openest and no one shutteth, and shuttest and no one openeth: come and bring the prisoner out of the prisonhouse, and him that sitteth in darkness and the shadow of death.

O ORIENS – 21 December

O Dayspring, Brightness of the Light Everlasting, and Sun of Righteousness: come and enlighten him that sitteth in darkness and the shadow of death.

O REX GENTIUM – 22 December

O King of Nations, and their Desire; the Cornerstone, who makest both one: come and save mankind, whom thou formedst of clay.

O EMMANUEL – 23 December

O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Desire of all nations and their Salvation: come and save us, O Lord our God.

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A Prayer for use during the Coronavirus outbreak

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

A Prayer of Richard Baxter:

Keep us, O Lord,
while we tarry on this earth,
in a serious seeking after thee,
and in an affectionate walking with thee,
every day of our lives;
that when thou comest,
we may be found not hiding our talent,
nor serving the flesh,
nor yet asleep with our lamp unfurnished,
but waiting and longing for our Lord,
our glorious King,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

The next issue of *Praying Together*
will be published on Monday 21 December